

Diabetes Self-Management: Your Feet Can Last a Lifetime

“Take Care of Your Feet For a Lifetime” is a campaign to teach people with diabetes how to prevent foot problems which can lead to lower leg amputation. Two types of foot problems can occur when you have diabetes. First, the nerves can become damaged preventing you from feeling when you have injured your foot. The second is poor blood circulation in the feet. If a sore develops on the foot, it may not heal well and there will be increased risk for infection. All people with diabetes are at risk for these complications. Those at highest risk are those who have had diabetes for more than 10 years; have uncontrolled blood sugar; are elderly; are male; and are Hispanic or African Americans.

It is estimated that 50% of all amputations in people with diabetes could be prevented with proper daily care. In 2004, 1789 adults with diabetes in Maryland, or about 5 people every day, had some portion of a foot or leg amputated. Only 75% of adults in Maryland with diabetes had their feet checked by their doctor in 2004.

You can take charge and lower your risk for foot problems. First, you must learn all that you can about diabetes and its complications. Next, be attentive to your feet everyday. Lastly, work with your health care team and get the recommended care for you and your feet.

Learn about diabetes. Find the balance of diet, exercise and medications that keep your blood sugar as near to normal as possible. By doing this you reduce the risk of nerve and circulation problems. If you already have signs of these problems, you may be able to prevent them from getting worse. If you smoke, ask your health provider to help you to quit. Smoking creates circulation problems too.

Basic Daily Care.

- Wash your feet every day. Test the water temperature to prevent burns. Do not soak your feet. Keep your feet clean and dry.
- Apply moisturizer to the foot after bathing, but do not moisturize between the toes.
- Inspect your feet daily. Use a mirror to see the bottom if necessary.
- Keep toenails trimmed. If you have numbness, poor circulation, poor vision or you just can't reach your feet let a foot care specialist help you. If you trim your own nails, do so after washing when they are soft. Cut with the shape of the toe and smooth sharp edges.
- Always wear well-fitting soft leather or fabric shoes. Never walk barefoot. Wear house shoes at home.
- Wear socks made of acrylic or other fiber that will wick away moisture. Avoid those with a tight band.
- Check your shoes daily for cracks, pebbles, or other things that might damage your feet.

Work with your health care provider.

Remove your socks and shoes at every visit, so your provider can examine your feet. At least once a year, your provider should test for sensation and circulation. If you have diabetes, it is likely that you will be referred to a podiatrist (foot care specialist) for this exam. Call your podiatrist or diabetes provider immediately if there is redness or swelling of your feet; pain in the legs while resting or while walking; open sores (no matter how small); ingrown toenails; or a change in the size or shape of your foot.

Protect your feet and prevent amputation! If you give them the care they deserve each day, keep your blood sugar as close to normal as possible, and work with your health care providers. ***Your feet can last a lifetime!***

References for articles:

Ahroni, Jessie and Neil Scheffler. **101 Tips on Foot Care for People with Diabetes.** 2nd edition. American Diabetes Association, 2006.

You can find this publication on the American Diabetes Association website for purchase: www.diabetes.org. Or you may call the ADA at 1-800-diabetes.

A Guide for People with Diabetes. Take Care of Your Feet for a Lifetime. NIH publication No. 04-4285. 2004.

You may order a copy of this free publication by going to the website: www.catalog.niddk.nih.gov to order. Or you may call them at 1-800-860-8747.

Maryland Hospital Discharge Data/Maryland Ambulatory Care Data, 2004.

Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey. Available from www.marylandbrfss.com.



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This news page is a product of the Maryland Diabetes Prevention and Control Program. The intent is to provide ongoing news and information about diabetes for the public, especially people with diabetes and their families.

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